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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes non-Anglo views of the concept of justice: these views are different from those of the dominant Anglo-American tradition and therefore make up one of the components of ethnicity. The author examines justice as a concept in the literature of three contemporary American authors, the Italian American Pietro Di Donato, Nelson Algren (whose descendents were Swedes and German Jews), and the Greek American Harry Mark Petrakis. Two categories of justice are discussed: (1) divine justice, the exercise of authority by God which implies a constant and universal moral law; (2) human justice which is either formal (codified in law) or informal (meted out by families, neighbors, and groups). It is found that these writers' views of justice are different from those of the larger American society in the following ways: (1) self-definition is attained through relationships with others rather than through lonely self-assertion; (2) informal justice, by emphasizing relationships with others and responsibilities to them, is possible and desirable; (3) formal justice fails as a means of attaining equity and fairness; (4) divine justice is often inscrutable but there is a constant moral law by which one tries to live. (Author/BE)

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"If you seek justice, put a gift on the scale": Concepts of Justice in White Ethnic American Literature

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Our word "justice" derives from the Latin justitia. To the ancient Greeks, "justice" was the first of four cardinal virtues.[1] Fittingly, the word and idea are central concepts in the literature of three contemporary American authors whose roots are in non-Anglo Europe: the Italian-American Pietro Di Donato; a Swedish German-Jew who writes about the Polish, Nelson Algren; and the Greek-American Harry Mark Petrakis. Their view of justice is quite different than that held by writers in the dominant Anglo-American tradition. If, as Michael Novak, Andrew Greeley, and other have demonstrated, ethnicity can be a point of departure for analyzing American society, then analyzing such a fundamental idea as concepts of justice in ethnic literature can yield new insights.

We generally divide the concept of justice into two categories, divine and human. Divine justice is the exercise of authority by god to maintain what is eternally right and to mete out rewards and punishments as deserved. This justice may be inscrutable and may or may not correspond with temporal law, but it implies a moral law that is constant and a vision of universal order. In our temporal lives human justice is formal or informal, and both imply social order. Formal justice is codified in laws and administered by governments and courts. Informal justice is meted out by families, neighbors, and groups. Whether divine or human, formal or informal, justice implies equity and fairness. The ancient concept carried to a logical conclusion is democratic; that is, customs, conditions, and laws change, but justice rests on the inherent rights of all.[2]

I want to examine concepts of justice in works by Di Donato, Algren,

and Petrakis for several reasons. First, they are fine writers who have been inadequately recognized in American literary criticism. Each writer has received some critical attention--a National Book Award for Algren, two nominations for that award for Petrakis. Di Donato has not had recognition on this level, although he is the only one of the three fortunate enough to have his best novel in print--Christ in Concrete. Second, the three have a vantage point between the older European and newer Americans worlds. Di Donato and Petrakis are second generation Americans and Algren is third generation. These men do not necessarily consider themselves ethnic writers--Petrakis, for example, rejects the labels "ethnic writer, or Greek writer."[3] Nevertheless, theirs is a unique historical position that gives them insights into the thoughts and actions of the first generation and also a perspective on contemporary America. The third reason I have chosen them is that their fiction tells us about those 70,000,000 or so of us today who are of southern, central, and eastern European stock, descendants of the immigrants who flooded into the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If our concepts of justice seem at odds at times with those of the larger American society, perhaps we can all through literature come to a better understanding of this.

Divine justice to these ethnics is quite personal. The immigrants brought with them a faith in destiny and handed this on to their descendants, so that Di Donato today remains a devout Roman Catholic, and Petrakis has maintained an alliance with the Greek Orthodox church. Algren's inheritance is unusual--Scandinavian-Zionist on one side, German-Jew on the other, and, appropriately, he is the most non-conforming believer.

Their concepts of human equity also differ from those in our dominant literature. Their forebears fled from enormous economic and political injustice,

escaping, as Di Donato has said, from "starvation, conscription and crushing taxes," and from cruel, relentless toil in a worn out land. Packed into steerage "no differently than livestock," they withstood terrible hardships in order to reach their destination or "destiny," the promised land for "fortunate pilgrims."[4] Once here, they did not depend on formal legal justice from a system which they either did not understand or perceived as working against them. Rather, one survived in America with help from others or by informal justice. In the logic of fulfillment, as Richard Gambino has expressed it in Blood of My Blood, a study that documents the transference of a value system from Italy to America, the children and grandchildren of these urban pioneers still believe that self-definition is shaped in relations with other people, institutions, works, and events.[5] One is born into commitments and responsibilities, and achieves maturity and selflessness within these relationships. Our dominant Anglo-American literature, by contrast, has placed great value on individuality and individual consciousness. One asserts his or her imperial self by rejecting social institutions and involvement. One finds salvation in lonely self-assertion. One takes to the woods, looks back nostalgically to a mythic past, escapes into fantasy, is driven into madness, or waits despairingly for the end. Justice, whether in the view of Mark Twain or Henry Adams, Ernest Hemingway or Kurt Vonnegut, is beyond attainment, and the search for it is futile. So much of this literature admires unencumbered youth, is suspicious of adulthood, and is hostile to city and community life. There is in it spiritual and metaphysical as well as self-isolation. A recent scholar of white ethnic literature has said that the definition of American literature "has been slanted toward literature about the isolato, the uprooted, the individualistic; a concept influenced by Enlightenment theories of individualism and Calvinistic ideas of personal, highly introspective attention to

to salvation." By contrast, white ethnic literature deals with individuals and their growth but always in the context of a group: the nuclear or extended family, an ethnic or work group, or the working class.[6]

Let me now turn to specific works by the three writers. Pietro Di Donato in Christ in Concrete agonizingly questions all justice. His search for divine justice is a classic Catholic example of faith tested and affirmed. His search for human fairness is very much connected to the ethnic experience of being disappointed by formal justice and then finding help and support informally. This semi-autobiographical novel is set in the 1920's in West Hoboken, New Jersey. On Good Friday, a regular workday, the immigrant brick mason Geremio protests to his padroni that the underpinnings of the building they are constructing are unsafe. The boss keeps the inspector drunk and insists the men continue working. To describe the brutal death scene, Di Donato takes images of inert or animal forms that seem to reduce the human body to an object (one recalls his observation of people packed like livestock into ships), then imagines his father's last prayer, his human spirit reaching for divinity, so that Geremio becomes more than just the sum of his parts. Di Donato yokes flower images to those of wood, metal, and cement, forming an intense lyrical style that serves to enhance Geremio's worth. As the building collapses, Geremio is "a worthless sack amongst the giant debris. . . ." His jaw splinters, his blue swollen face is smashed against the beams. His outstretched arms are "caught securely through the meat by thin round bars of reinforcing steel":

> 'Mother mine--mother of Jesu--Annunziata--children of mine. . . . Mercy, blessed father--salvation. . . . help me. . . . Jesu, Jesu. . . ." His mangled voice trebled hideously, and hung in jerky whimperings. Blood vessels burst like mashed flower stems. He screamed, 'Show yourself now, Jesu! . . . ohh, why do you let it happen--where are you? . . .' His

> bones cracked mutely and his sanity went sailing distorted in the limbo of his subconscious. . . (Christ in Concrete, pp. 29-30.

Geremio's crushed body is discovered on Easter Sunday.

The novelist shifts his focus to Geremio's son Paul (Di Donato himself), who at age twelve is the oldest of eight children and must take charge of the bereft family. Paul's search for justice is at first for legal aid which he finds unsatisfactory. When he goes to claim his father's body, the police are callous and indifferent. Then a grocer refuses credit—above the cash register is a sign, "In God We Trust * * * Others Pay Cash!" On the morgue-like Municipal Building wall, Paul reads "JUSTICE" and "EQUALITY," but because Geremio was an alien the family is denied welfare (Christ in Concrete, pp. 74-75). Without means, Paul cannot event attempt to put a little gift on the scales of justice. Paul's mother's application for workmen's compensation is delayed by smooth-talking lawyers. One recalls another old Italian saying, "When you say lawyer, you say thief." Paul next seeks less formalized human justice and is initially disappointed when a well-fed priest gives him cake for his family but announces he is powerless to dispence charity. But informal justice is now achieved; the family members stand together, and members of the Italian community help out. Tenement neighbors and friends, themselves needy, give the family food, clothing, and money, and Geremio's former fellow workers arrange for Paul, barely in his teens, to work as a bricklayer. By contrast, more formalized justice again fails. Paul does an adult's job but the company cheats him on his pay. Nor does the company make the scaffolds safe. His Uncle Luigi is permanently injured in a fall.

To Paul, recalling Geremio's crucifixion, divine justice seems to be an illusion. A Jewish friend whose brother was killed in Russia by Czarist soldiers, insists to Paul that there is no god. Paul dreams that he wanders through mazes of stone and steel into a dead end where his father whispers,

"I was cheated, my children also will be crushed, cheated. . ." (Christ in Concrete, p. 298). When he learns his mother has cancer, a suffering Paul smashes a crucifix and cries out to her that religion is a lie. Paul's solitary ego asserts itself: "I want Justice here! I want happiness here! I want life here!" (Christ in Concrete, p. 306). Annunziata perceives her son's error and strikes him, but as a symbol of flowering motherhood she then begs forgiveness and prays that he have faith and that he take care of the younger children. It is at this point that Paul reaches understanding and maturity and accepts his inherited obligations and his fate.

Rose B. Green, in her analysis of Italian-American novels, demonstrates that they are usually affirmative.[8] One finds, indeed, that in all Di Donato's works men, women, even children can possess real moral power within their fates. "Destiny," "miracles," the "wheel of fate" reappear in The Penitent, a powerful Italian Dantesque narrative of crime, punishment, and redemption. Twenty-year-old Alessandro Serenelli is brutalized by endless labor and poverty. He is a "hermit snail" who is totally self-immersed and therefore lost.[9] Serenelli tries to rape a twelve-year-old girl, and when Mraia Goretti will not yield, he hacks her to death. As she dies she forgives him and prays for his soul, saintly actions that foreshadow her canonization. Serenelli is without sorrow or regret the first years of imprisonment; then slowly, painfully, through dreams, revelations, and reading, he transforms his life. Released from prison after almost thirty years, he dedicates himself to faith and good words. Once again, there is divine justice.

Contradistinctively to this somberness is a strong vein of humor in much of Di Donato's writing that helps to give it a broad emotional range. If tragedy in Christ in Concrete and The Penitent has behind it a concept of

universal order, Di Donato's comedy presupposes social order. One can see in the novel Three Circles of Light that Di Donato, while taking seriously the search for human justice, can laugh at an absurd quest for it in New Jersey. Uncle Barbarosso, a bachelor "by destiny" and a devout anarchist, has a beloved pet dog General Garibaldi. Because the dog is old, rheumatic, and half blind, Barbarosso decides it "shall leave this exploited world, like a fearless warrior on the glorious field of battle. . . ."[10] Barbarosso, the chief dynamiter for a building foundation company, makes a belt from an old corset, and wraps belt, dynamite sticks, and the sacred flag of the Garibaldi legion around the animal. Then he lights the fuse in a neighbor's yard and runs for safety. Surprisingly, the pet is galvanized into movement and runs after his master. Garibaldi is blown to kingdom come along with the front of the Compitello house. There are no human injuries, fortunately, and for once formal justice is served when Barbarosso must pay his neighbors for the damage.

In the Polish Chicago slums of Nelson Algren's books, his people are greater victims and less in control of their destinities than are Di Donato's. Family and close relationships are as important to Algren as to Di Donato, but the difference is that the social system has so oppressed the poor that essential committments and interdependencies are almost destroyed. Furthermore, Algren insists that American society has misconceived divine justice. Algren's people have absolutely no belief in legal even-handedness, although they retain a lingering hope for informal and divine equity.

Algren may be the best known of these writers, but critical interpretations have often been unsatisfactory. Barbara Gelfant, in The American City Novel, has denied his ethnicity, saying that Man With the Golden Arm is

not unified by a common ethnic, racial, or religious bond but rather "by the common background of disorder."[11] His ability to write truly about the Polish has been questioned, chiefly, I suspect, because some do not care for his close scrutiny of the underside of American life. Attacking Algren's lack of belief and, by extension, his abandonment of a search for justice, Charles Walcutt has said that Algren has given up on society. Joseph Waldmeir has called Algren's a "quest without faith" in a godless world lacking social or universal order and meaning.[12]

As early, however, as his Marxian and non-ethnic Somebody in Boots, Algren's search for justice has consistently held a strong sense of order violated. Petrakis, in recognition of this, has called Algren a "tragic poet."[13] Algren has said that the writer must stand beside the accused, "the losers": convicts, prostitutes, grifters, petty pilferers, drunks, addicts.[14] These people's greatest crime is to own "nothing at all, in the one land where ownership and virtue are one." He has argued that the "necessity of bringing the judge on the bench into the dock has been the peculiar responsibility of the writer. . . ."[15] Thus, Algren's search for equity and fairness for the disinherited aims at involving us, his readers, on their behalf. As Walter Rideout has said, Algren has steadily protested against "the still limited American democracy that is" and has affirmed "the democracy that can be."[16] This is his destiny which he is still following. Recently he was reported to be living in a working class community in New Jersey and writing about a triple murder conviction.[17]

Never Come Morning is based on the lives of Polish people among whom Algren grew up. Bruno Lefty Bicek, the slum boxer and thug, is trapped in poverty. He loves Steffi Postenkowski but betrays her by letting her be gang raped, and then in self-rage he kills a man standing in line. The gang

delivers Steffi to a brothel. Her mother, widowed and running a poolroom, cannot help her daughter. Bruno's bedridden mother is also widowed. As a prostitute Steffi is among the hunted, and the police are the hunters for "protection" money. Lefty becomes a pimp for Mama Tomek's brothel which exists with the cooperation of the law. Thus, the legal force is part of Steffi's and Lefty's exploitation. "Mama Tomek's" is, in addition, an ironic comment on broken family life. Donald Black's excellent study The Behavior of Law is a sociological description of societies in which the law is not impartial but works quantitatively against the poor and has vertical downward direction against those who have less of the world's goods. Black shows that law is a form of social control which increases in its application as other types of control such as the family are weakened or break down.[18] Algren's fictional world is an artistic rendering and a realistic account of the breakdown of traditional family and religious structures. A sign over the desk of detective "One-Eye" Tenczara satirizes conventional ideas of divine as well as human justice: "I have only myself to blame for my fall" (Never Come Morning, p. 78). The doctrine of original sin is thus distorted in a society dedicated to individuality. A recurring refrain is "God has forgotten us all. . . . He has forgotten our names" (Never Come Morning, p. 205). The impulse to believe, however, keeps Steffi hoping--she wants to go to church but fears she will blaspheme, so she prays in her brothel room. Although Steffi must betray Lefty to the house owner and police in order to survive, she and Lefty transcend their mutual betrayals and plan to marry and reorder their lives. It is too late, and Lefty is convicted of murder.

Like Di Donato, Algren uses animal images to show that his people are more than just that and lets images of mutilation reinforce his vision. Steffi is a wingless fly. Lefty is symbolized by a wolf's head in a taxidermist's

window. Fully developing his fiction in Man With the Golden Arm, Algren fuses concepts of justice into a complicated structure of symbols of animal life, religion, and the heart, so that all form an integrated and masterful novel. A distinctive structural principle of comic and tragic episodes further reveals Algren's search for justice. Moreover, in his desire to right the horrible disorder of his world, Algren satirically links legal injustice to what is the conventional view of divine justice, heightening the discrepancy between what is and what should be, as in the novel's opening scene in the Division Street police station:

> . . . here God and the ward super work hand in hand and neither moves without the other's assent. God loans the super cunning and the super forwards a percentage of the grift on Sunday mornings. The super puts in the fix for all right-thinking hustlers and the Lord, in turn, puts in the fix for the super, for the super's God is a hustler's God; and as wise, in his way, as the God of the priests and the businessmen (Man With the Golden Arm, p. 7).

The roach floating in a pail of dirty water in this scene typifies Frankie Majcinek's life. Frankie's morphine addiction is the monkey on his back. Dope is god's medicine. Sparrow Saltskin is Frankie's loyal friend. Scrounging blind Piggy eats insects. Only the alcoholic dog Rumdum sleeps "the sleep of the just" (Man With the Golden Arm, p. 110). Simultaneously we are reminded of the human heart. Molly Novotny's heart-shaped face tugs at Frankie's heart. Frank has won a purple heart in the Army--it is the treatment for this wound which leads to his addiction. The police Captain Bednarski must will himself an iron heart in order to stand his job. Metal contrasts to the heart--the police tower with its red and green lights shining above the tenements is "an iron caricature" of a Christmas tree, and Frankie's jail sentence for theft is served in an "iron sanctuary" (Man With the Golden Arm, pp. 166 and 168). Frankie's golden arm may help him as a dealer but is the receptacle of the morphine needle and ultimately the agent of his suicide by

hanging. A luminous crucifix hangs on the wall above crippled Sophie's wheelchair in the tenement apartment, and Sophie feels a "bond of blood and pain" with what is to her the sacred heart (Man With the Golden Arm, p. 95). Again, god has forgotten his own. Goegre Bluestone has pointed out that Algren's recurrent religious imagery is like the chanting of a ritual, a surrogate prayer.[19] In this society of guilt, accusation, and suffering, everyone is crucified: Bednarski, Sparrow, Sophie, Molly, Frankie.

Algren's is a heart-wrenching picture of friendship, love, tenderness, pride, and dignity, all struggling to survive in Antek's tavern, Schwiefka's gambling room, in the deteriorating Polish neighborhood, and within tenement apartments. Many of the characters recall happier, more stable family lives of their childhoods and youth which they would like to recapture. They relate to each other on the basis of being Polish and Catholic; Frankie feels responsible for Sophie, and Antek offers to loan the dealer money. Frankie wants to believe and would go to mass, he says, if he could reverse the events of his life.

Algren's last chapter "Witness Sheet" combines the style of an inquisition and a police report for the coroner's inquest on the body of Francis Majcinek. We are the witnesses who allow officialdom linked to organize religion to destroy human justice and put the fix on divine justice. Although Frankie killed the drug pusher Louie Fomorowski, Bednar only put the heat on Frankie because it was an election year.

Algren has said that were he to rewrite this novel, he would not have Frankie commit suicide. "A more tragic ending would have been for him to go into isolation--cut himself off from people--as many addicts do." Algren was true to his vision in the book, however; but it is instructive that he sees

isolation as tragic, an "American disease" affecting us all.[20] At the novel's center, Bednar did not understand when a defrocked priest in the lineup said that he was busted for cashing phony checks because, "I believe we are all members of one another" (Man With the Golden Arm, p. 198). The captain has further cut himself off from "communion with humanity" because he has thought of himself as God-like, as one "who tempered Justice with Mercy" (Man With the Golden Arm, p. 298). At the end the captain and we know we are all members of one another. Just as Frankkie, Lefty, Molly, Steffi, and Sparrow achieve moral awareness, so can we, for it is our humanity that is divine.

Harry Petrakis also chronicles the Chicago ethnic experience and like Algren and Di Donato fuses a lyrical style with earthiness to reaffirm the value and uniqueness of our human life. Destiny to Petrakis is intensely personal. Petrakis has said that regardless of how mad or pretentious it may sound, he has felt a sense of "destiny," a path of "redemption" open to him through his writing.[21] Petrakis is less concerned than Algren with legal injustice, and informal relationships more often succeed than they do in Algren's works. Like the other two writers, Petrakis values informal human justice within a web of relationships and mutual help. He, too, questions divine Christian justice but adds another dimension to his quest, the Greek mythic concept. The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis recalls Homer, while the headnote is from Ecclesiastes: "Truly the light is sweet. . . yet let him remember the days of darkness: for they shall be many."[22] Kostas and Katerina work out their destiny by fleeing impoverished Crete for Chicago. After years of tenement dwelling and gruelling labor in a cousin's restaurant, they achieve and share the joys of a house, family, friends, and material comfort. But they suffer, too. They lose a child through illness, and when one son Alex kills another, like Cain and Abel,

in a family quarrel, Kostas casts Alex out of his family and heart. Alex goes to prison for his crime. After ten years Kostas relents and visits Alex at Joliet. In a grim and moving scene over which lies the chill of death, father and son are reconciled. Another crucial scene in The Odyssey is of the dedicated, compassionate Father Markos debating faith with the atheist, an equally good man, Dr. Barbaris. When they ask Kostas to settle the argument, he replies:

> 'I don't know. . . . There are moments when looking at the faces of my children or when remembering my dead that I cannot bear that God might not exist. There are other times when it seems madness to think he could be a witness to what takes place each day and night on earth. But whether he exists or not . . . we should live our lives as though he existed' (The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis, p. 100).

The closure finds Kostas deciding that in spite of all pain and suffering, he would "encounter again the destiny of all men," which is to live his life (The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis, p. 271).

The Greek-American scholar Theodore Saloutos believes that adherance to the Greek church for Greek Americans is a national sentiment, a uniting cultural force, rather than a religious conviction.[23] This seems so for many of Petrakis' characters, including Matsoukas in A Dream of Kings.[24] Odysseus-like Matsoukas is a post World War II immigrant, a veteran of the war against the fascists. He thus demonstrates that collective relationships must not be carried to a totalitarian extreme. Living in Chicago among the poor and marginal, he is clever and survival oriented and hustles a living as an astrologer, poet, real estate agent, instructor of wrestling, counsellor on masturbation and bedwetting—anything to make a dollar. He loves his two daughters, Faith and Hope, and his disenchanted wife, though like Geremio he is a wine drinking, lusty pleasure seeker and woman chaser. Like Di Donato and Algren, Petrakis blends comedy and tragedy. In a brilliantly funny scene,

he imagines an illegal gambling den, the Minoan Music House, as Aristophones' city of birds, a cloud-cuckoo borough, and the gamblers as a feathered company of pigeons and sparrows, falcons and hawks. Petrakis also uses images of animals to emphasize our human divinity. Matsoukas passionately loves his son, a modern Telemachus, blind and retarded Stavros who is a "small black moth pinned to the ground in a raging shell," a caged and crippled bird with whom Matsoukas can communicate (A Dream of Kings, p. 25). Because of Stavros, Matsoukas questions divine justice. After the boy suffers a particularly savage seizure in church, Matsoukas says that once god could apportion out heaven and hell but now god and glory have gone and error and chance rule the world. Matsoukas makes the sign of the cross over the silent church, "Man have mercy upon you. . ." (A Dream of Kings, p. 92).

Once again, informal justice prevails, and a kind of Greek destiny is achieved. Matsoukas wants to return to Greece, for he believes the Greek sun will heal his son's sick body.. But Matsoukas has bad luck and cannot get up the fare. An inveterate, usually honest gambler, he resorts to cheating. The Turkish house man discovers Matsoukas using loaded dice and beats him up, only sparing the Greek because Matsoukas pleads for his life for the sake of his son. When he drags himself home, his mother-in-law shrieks, "God has punished you for your filthy body . . . for all the debauched evil of your heart! Bastard! Animal! Filth!" (A Dream of Kings, p. 154). Here again is a warped concept of divine fairness. It is the dealer Cicero who loves Matsoukas and is right about his friend--Matsoukas has been chosen for eternal disaster but takes each catastrophe and blow and turns them into a kind of triumph, giving "life the offering of an undivided heart" (A Dream of Kings, pp. 108-109). As Matsoukas has said, "There are laws of the heart . . . which transcend the laws of men," a statement Algren might have made (A Dream of Kings, p. 119).

Matsoukas' wife steals her mother's hidden hoard of money and urges her husbandband to take it so he and Stavros can fly to Greece. She knows, as we do, that Stavros will die and that Matsoukas will return to his Chicago family. But her deed and his act of faith testify to life.

Petrakis' In the Land of Morning again attests to divine justice within Greek mythology.[25] Its title, like Algren's Never Come Morning, recalls a prayer but is obviously more positive. Like Algren, Petrakis seeks our involvement and commitment. A Chicago recreation of the Orestean trilogy, the homecoming of Orestes is that of young Alex Rifakis, alienated and depressed, from Viet Nam. If there is a statement on legal injustice, it is that Alex's Chicago neighborhood is undergoing urban renewal and reminds him of the ruined Viet Nam landscape. The Rifakis are a cursed family. In Alex's absence, his mother Asmene Rifakis (Clytemnestra) has taken a lover, the gangster Antonio Gallos (Aegisthus), and Alex's father has died of a heart attack. Now Gallos is killed in his bath by a grudge-bearing employee. Alex is involved as he has accompanied the assassin in an effort to discover his mother with Gallos and kill her. She escapes. When Alex senses the depth of her love and grief for Gallos, he is repentent. Although he has been confused and lost, he is drawn to a young war widow who has an infant son, and together they manage to finally salvage something of a future for themselves.

A priest is central to this novel. Father Naoum once believed life had coherence and rationality. Neither a prophet nor saint, he is the good man involved with and dedicated to others. His portrait is reminiscent of Petrakis' own father in Stelmark: A Family Recollection, a beautiful rendering by Petrakis of growing up Greek and poor in Chicago. At one point the priest-father, when asked to sign a legal petition barring Blacks from buying or renting neighbor-

Notes

[1]The title is from an old Sicilian saying. The other three virtues are prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

[2]Definitions are from The Oxford Universal Dictionary, ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), as well as from sources on the law.

[3]Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr., "The Song of the Thrush: An Interview With Harry Mark Petrakis," Chicago Review, 28, No. 3 (Winter 1977), 111. This is the only interview with Petrakis to appear in a major journal.

[4]Pietro Di Donato, "A Rinascimento on L. I.," The New York Times. 14 Nov., 1971, pp. 1 and 16, sect. 1A; Mario Puzo, The Fortunate Pilgrim (New York: Atheneum, 1964).

[5]Richard Gambino, Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian-Americans (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 154-166.

[6]Betty A. Burch, "The Assimilation Experience of Five American White Ethnic Novelists of the Twentieth Century," Dissertation Abstracts, 34 (1974), 4246A (Minnesota, 1973). Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), makes a similar point about Bernard Malamud's fiction and states that this is what distinguishes it from other American literature. Tanner does not make the ethnic connection, however.

[7]Pietro Di Donato, Christ in Concrete: A Novel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1939), p. 25. Hereafter references to this book are in the text.

[8]Rose Basile Green, The Italian-American Novel: A Document of the Interaction of Two Cultures (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson Univ., 1974).

[9]Pietro Di Donato, The Penitent (New York: Hawthorn, 1962), p. 40.

[10]Pietro Di Donato, Three Circles of Light (New York: Julian Messner, 1960), p. 82.

[11]Blanche Housman Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma, 1954), p. 252.

[12]Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1956), pp. 298-299; Joseph Waldmeir, "Quest Without Faith," in Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963); pp. 53-56. In Nelson Algren, Never Come Morning (1942; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. ix-xiv, Algren recounts his skirmishes with Polish-American critics. Hereafter references to this book are in the text. A defense of the accuracy of Algren's fiction is by John W. Petras, "Polish-Americans in Sociology and Fiction," Polish American Studies, 21, No. 1 (Jan.-June, 1964), 16-22.

[13]Nelson Algren, Somebody in Boots: A Novel (New York: Vanguard, 1935); Rodgers, p. 112.

[14]Robert A. Perlongo, "Interview With Nelson Algren," Chicago Review, 11, No. 3 (Autumn 1957), 95; Nelson Algren, The Neon Wilderness (1948: rpt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 10.

[15]Nelson Algren, Man With the Golden Arm: A Novel (Garden City: Doubleday, 1949), p. 17 Hereafter references to this book are in the text. Nelson Algren, Who Lost An American? (London: Andre Deutsch, 1963), p. 268.

[16]Walter B. Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States 1900-1954 (Cambridge: Harvard, 1956), p. 289. The first full-length study of Algren places him firmly in the ethnic tradition: Martha Heasley Cox and Wayne Chatterton, Nelson Algren (Boston: Twayne, 1975).

[17]"Algren Decides to Live in Paterson," The New York Times, 125, No. 42,982, 29 Sept. 1975, 61, col. 3

[18]Donald Black, The Behavior of Law (New York: Academic, 1976), pp. 13-21 and 107.

[19]George Bluestone, "Nelson Algren," The Western Review, 22, No. 1 (Autumn 1957), 39.

[20]Perlongo, p. 96; David Ray, "A Talk on the Wild Side; a Bowl of Coffee with Nelson Algren," The Reporter, 11 June 1959, p. 32.

[21]Rodgers, pp. 115-116. Rodgers states that Petrakis is diff erent from many modern novelists in that there is no wasteland of the spirit in his books, a point that reinforces my observation that white ethnic literature does not share some of the same premises as other American literature.

[22]Harry Mark Petrakis, The Odyssey of Kostas Volakis (New York: David McKay, 1963). Hereafter references to this book are in the text. I have done a depth analysis of Petrakis' fiction: Helen Geracimos Chapin, "'Chicagopolis'--The Double World of Harry Mark Petrakis," The Old Northwest, 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1976), 401-413.

[23]Theodore Saloutos, The Greeks in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard, 1964), p. 18.

[24]Harry Mark Petrakis, A Dream of Kings (New York: David McKay, 1966). Hereafter references to this book are in the text.

[25]Harry Mark Petrakis, In the Land of Morning (New York: David McKay, 1973).

[26]Harry Mark Petrakis, Stelmark: A Family Recollection (New York: David McKay, 1970), pp. 137-138.

hood property, replies that he will if the petitioners obtain his boss's signature. Your bishop, they ask? "'The Big Boss,' my father said.' 'Jesus Christ.'"[26]

Once again, the ethnic American writer is saying that the self is achieved in relationship with others and responsibility to them. Formal legal justice will probably fail us. Informal justice, based on compassion and understanding, is still possible and desirable. Divine justice is often inscrutable, but there is a constant moral law by which one tries to live.